



Rep. Michelle Rehwinkel Vasilinda
Florida House of Representatives
District 9

May 14, 2010

The Honorable Charlie Crist
Governor
The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Governor:

I know you love and respect Florida and her people; it is evident in your actions and words. With this in mind, I am writing to ask you to take a greater leadership role with the Gulf State Governors to bring the highest level experts and leaders together from around the world to keep a watchful eye on BP, Halliburton, and Transocean corporations. A team of scientists, environmentalists, and other thinkers of the highest caliber would act as a check to the corporate profit motives that brought us to this most dreadful point in our state's history. In addition, a task force of some of the best minds in the world is the kind of effort necessary to stop the hemorrhage of oil in the Gulf and find ways to mitigate the terrible damage. Please assemble such a task force to triage this catastrophe in the Gulf and act as your advisors immediately.

Please also use your leadership and love of Florida as your motivation to ask Floridians to go beyond a constitutional ban on oil and away from dangerous drilling and dirty energy. Ask Floridians to reduce their consumption of oil by walking, carpooling, biking, taking a bus, and driving more conservatively. This will be important to lead the way for new habits that are environmentally sustainable. As an added benefit, Floridians will be healthier and may help drive down medical costs and gasoline bills at a time when state and family budgets are tight.

The third step is an aggressive jobs program in renewable energy production. While we have suffered during the recession with a 12.3 percent unemployment rate, higher than the national average, the Deep Horizon Oil spill disaster has already spiked the unemployment rate even higher. The development of clean, renewable energy, conservation and efficiencies will put Floridians back to work. Quick action is required to not only keep Florida from an economic disaster but to show Floridians a brighter future and give them hope. Florida has the opportunity to come from far behind and lead the nation in energy choices that respect our earth, steward the environment, and stabilize the economy, then grow it.

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I would like to offer a few ideas for legislation that could be part of the call of a special session to meet this unprecedented crisis head on:

- **Enact a Public Benefit Fund-** Florida has no secure, recurring source of funding for renewable energy. This past legislative session, Senator Bennett and I sponsored a bill that would establish a Public Benefit Fund, similar to that enacted in almost half the states. Compelled by the depletion of funds secured for the successful Solar Rebate Program and the large backlog of approved rebate applicants who will not receive any rebates for their investments, I fought for the reauthorization of the rebate program with funds from this Public Benefit Fund. Now is not the time to have thousands of Floridians carrying loans of up to \$20,000 or more for doing the right thing. The monthly 0.25 cents system benefit charge results in an extremely minimal amount (\$3.00 annually per individual electric utility customer), but overall provides a substantial funding base for renewable energy in the state. In this time of crisis, perhaps that amount of surcharge could be raised in order to accomplish more jobs and renewable energy creation more quickly. Also, setting the Fund up as a Direct-Support Organization permits additional types of funds to be deposited into the Fund – federal monies, grant monies, bequests, and gifts. We all must help one another in this storm and find a path to a better day.
- **Removing the Bottled Water Tax Exemption:** Another potential revenue source for renewable energy and environmental conservation is the tax collected from bottled water. Senator Lynn and I have carried this bill together for the past two years. This legislation makes drinking water in containers subject to the 06% sales tax and would close a tax loophole that potentially provides an approximate \$42 million in additional revenue. Companies that bottle water drawn from our aquifer (via direct pumping or through municipal pipes) are selling bottled water here as well as shipping it out of state for sale, without sales taxes. This legislation may encourage additional consideration regarding permitting additional draw downs on the Florida Aquifer, by water-bottling companies and may also ultimately reduce the amount of plastic bottles, made with petroleum, that clog our landfills.
- **Gasoline Sales Tax-** The legislature should consider a .05 cents sales tax increase on each net gallon of motor fuel, except diesel fuel gasoline, to support public transportation purposes including trolleys, light rail, and clean, renewable, and energy-efficient buses, with priority given to school district buses. Revenue generated from a fuel sales tax should also be used to support non-nuclear renewable energy development, conservation and efficiency grants.

Please consider these three options that would both generate significant revenue for renewable energy production in Florida while also having minimal impact on tax payers.

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Additionally, please consider other compelling issues to protect Florida's beautiful natural resources and save our economy from the impacts of the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill:

- A constitutional amendment that would dedicate Florida to clean renewable energy (not including coal or nuclear power) to forge a new energy paradigm and ensure the preservation of our environment and prevention of future devastating accidents. This could include a renewable energy portfolio standard.
- Legislative action to help the beleaguered tourism industry in Florida to prevent massive job loss and a collapse in state revenues.
- Legislation for clean public transportation – possibly funded from Stimulus dollars, or the revenue producing ideas listed above – to create livable communities that allow for greater public transportation and pedestrian traffic and that are not automobile-dependent.
- Legislation that ensures Florida's ability to seek financial compensation from BP for losses to our natural environment and our economy.
- A Resolution to Congress requiring safety measures – such as the acoustic shut-off valve that could have prevented the Deepwater Horizon spill – be installed at all oil rigs in the Gulf.

Thank you for your leadership and your willingness to consider these options to be included in your call for a special session. Florida needs courageous and strong leadership right now more than ever. It is our duty to empower Floridians to forge ahead with hope and purpose. Florida can survive and, someday soon, thrive in the aftermath of this horrible event.

Sincerely,



Michelle Rehwinkel Vasilinda
Representative, District 9

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